

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 05001407

Date Listed: 4/21/2006

Sears, Roebuck & Company

Mail Order Building

Los Angeles

CA

Property Name

County

State

N/A

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



Signature of the Keeper

4/21/06
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

U. T. M. Coordinates:

The corrected U. T. M coordinates for the Sears property should read:

A.	11	387080	3765460
B.	11	387480	3765320
C.	11	387440	3765000
D.	11	387120	3765120

[The polygon created by the UTM points generally encompasses the nominated parcel, but does not define the exact boundaries. The boundaries are presented more precisely in the verbal boundary description and sketch map.]

These clarifications were confirmed with the CA SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building**

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number **2650 East Olympic Boulevard** **NA** ☐ not for publication

city or town **Los Angeles** **NA** ☐ vicinity

state **California** code **CA** county **Los Angeles** code **039** zip code **90023**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Stephen D. Mikesell
Signature of certifying official

3/10/06
Date

California Office of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the National
Register

☐ other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

[Signature]

Date of Action

4/21/06

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE – Department Store, Warehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE – Department Store, Warehouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT – Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Concrete & Synthetics

walls Concrete

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1927-1955

Significant Dates

1927 - building constructed

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Nimmons, George C., architect

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 12.3 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	11	387300	3765300	3	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	4	—	—	—

☐ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title **Teresa Grimes**organization date **June 30, 2005**street & number **4211 Glenalbyn** telephone **323-221-0942**city or town **Los Angeles** state **CA** zip code **90065****Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name **10309 Folsom Blvd. L.P., attn: Mark Weinstein**street & number **1640 5th Street, Suite 112** telephone **310-395-3430**city or town **Los Angeles** state **CA** zip code **90401**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

The Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building is located on a 22-acre parcel of land at the southwest corner of Olympic Boulevard and Soto Street. Constructed of reinforced concrete, the building has an irregular plan and a flat roof. A wide two-story base surrounds the building's nine-story mass. The tall central tower divides the primary elevation. The tower, steeped profile, and cast stone ornamentation around the entrances are all evocative of the Art Deco style. The two-story sections on the front (north) facade, as well as portions on the east and west, were covered with a flat-panel cladding system in 1964. A series of additions were made to the rear of the building between 1929 and 1964. Nevertheless, the building continues to retain sufficient integrity to convey its feeling, association, location, setting, materials, and design.

The original portion of the building has a rectangular shape with an east-west orientation. The central tower provides a strong vertical emphasis to the mostly nine-story mass of the building. Its form and ornamentation are the focal point of the design. Windows are stacked vertically in two columns and run up the center of the tower on all four sides. As the tower rises to the top it steps back and is vertically articulated with narrow bas-relief panels. The two wings on either side of the tower are identical in design. Along the primary elevation these wings step down to eight stories. Cast stone elements and other formed concrete decorations mark the roof parapets.

The retail store is located in the lower two stories of the north end of the building, which fronts Olympic Boulevard. This portion of the building was remodeled in 1964. Originally it was designed in an A-B-C-B-A pattern with the main entrance located at the base of the tower. The design of the main entrance repeated the design of the tower in that it stood out from the rest of the base. Massive piers to each side stepped up as they rose vertically. Bas-relief panels accented the top of each pier and three more were positioned above the side-by-side doorways. This set of doorways was framed by bas-relief work. Above the doorways were multi-paned windows. The middle bays were more simply detailed the outer bays, which featured ornamentation similar to that used on the tower and main entrance. Secondary entrances were located on the east and west sides, and were probably more heavily used than the main entrance as they were related to the surface parking lots on each side of the building. The fenestration on all floors consisted of large metal-frame industrial windows set in large horizontal openings between the piers. Many of the windows contained paired sets of operating casement sashes. Metal fire escapes climbed the building on the east and west elevations, and a series of basement level loading docks characterized the south elevation. Elevators used by the mail order departments were located at the southeast and west corners.

Additions were planned for the south end of the building as the business grew and that turned out to be the case. The first addition was made in 1929. The existing Art Deco style entrance on the west elevation dates from this period. Other additions followed in 1940, 1959, and 1964. The 1929 and 1940 additions are illustrated on the 1950 Sanborn Map in section 10 page 15 of this application. Each

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

addition consisted of reinforced concrete construction, but the engineering was different in each phase. Steel-framed casement windows continued to be used but were slightly different in each addition. In some cases, window openings on the side and rear additions have been closed. The 1940 alterations also included the existing signage on top of the tower.

The upper floors of the north end and all of the south end of the building was used by the mail order department. Many of the upper floors retain the open floor plans. Most remain unaltered. The reinforced concrete construction that characterizes the building, including the structural columns and solid floor slabs, is visible throughout the interior. The original building features mushroom-shaped columns and solid floor slabs, while the additions employ the more traditional use of square columns and concrete beams and girders.

On the east and west sides of the building are surface parking lots. On the rear, the loading dock is set just off 12th Street. There are a few mature specimen trees, mostly *Chorisia speciosa* along the front (north) elevation. They do not appear to have been part of a designed historic landscape plan. The property is otherwise void of plant life.

While the 1959 and 1964 rear additions do not detract from the significance of the building, they are not character-defining features. In fact, it was anticipated that additions would be required as business grew. The changes to the front of the building are incompatible with the historic architecture, but reversible. Much of the original material remains underneath the existing cladding, as it was integral to the structural system of the building. The existing cladding consists of pre-cast concrete aggregate panels with steel frames. The use, layout, and circulation system in this part of the building were not changed. The main entrance on Olympic Boulevard and the side entrances off the adjacent parking lots continue to function as they did originally. However, the doorways have been replaced and they were reclad with travertine. Given the massive scale of the structure, the unaltered state of the upper floors, the reversibility of the 1964 changes, the building continues to retain sufficient integrity to reflect its historic significance.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3 Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

The Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. The building is historically significant in the context of commerce for its strong association with Sears, Roebuck & Company. Perhaps no other business institution in the United States is as responsible for ushering in the era of mass consumption as Sears, Roebuck & Company. Originally constructed in 1927, the Los Angeles building housed Sears, Roebuck & Company's warehouse, distribution, and merchandising facilities for the entire southwestern United States, as well as one of the company's early retail stores. As such, the Los Angeles building played a critical role in the success of the company. Although the company continues to occupy the retail store, the period of significance has been arbitrarily set at 1955 because nothing of exceptional importance occurred after that time. Like most commercial structures, the Los Angeles building has seen alterations and additions over the years. Yet the original building is easily envisioned without its later appendages and continues to convey its role in the commercial history of the nation.

Sears, Roebuck & Company was synonymous with the surge in the mass consumer market in America during the early and mid-twentieth century. Established in 1886 by Richard Sears, the company became one of the largest mail-order businesses in the country and the seventh largest corporation in the world. By 1927, Sears provided goods to eleven million customers, equaling one out of every three American families, and distributed over seventy-five million catalogs per year.

Julius Rosenwald, who assumed operation of the business in 1895, leaving Richard Sears to market the company's products, is largely attributed with the success of this mail-order empire. Under Rosenwald, Sears came to encompass all the processes of a capitalistic enterprise, including the processes of extraction, fabrication, distribution, and consumption. He sought to offer rural customers a broad range of products, and developed a new business ethic that promoted customer satisfaction. The company slogan, "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back," for example, reflected this new philosophy. A new emphasis was also placed on economies of scale and the streamlining of product distribution, as business expanded and a new operating infrastructure was created.

The infrastructure necessary to sustain the company's expansion rested upon ten (later twelve) mail-order centers strategically located across the country. Constructed between 1906 and 1928, these centers handled the processing and distribution of orders from customers, and were specifically located so that most customer orders could be filled in three to four days. In these buildings was captured the scale and ambition of the country's rapid expansion and improving standard of living. They remain architectural centerpieces in the neighborhoods they occupy and some are, to this day, among the largest structures in their respective regions.

During the late 1920s as more people began to live and work in American cities, a shift emerged in the consumer market as retail stores eclipsed the success of the older mail-order businesses. To capitalize on

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 4 **Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California**

these changes, Sears, Roebuck & Company hired General Robert Wood in 1924. Formerly employed by Montgomery Ward, the company's major competitor, Wood launched a campaign to pursue new retail markets found in the rising American working class.

Wood built upon the success of Sears' established mail-order business by building a network of retail stores around the existing mail-order centers and distribution infrastructure. In fact, many of the mail-order centers constructed in the late 1920s, including the one in Los Angeles, incorporated retail stores in their original design as a result. Wood's strategy was a success. Between 1925 and 1927, twenty-two Sears' stores opened in major United States cities. In 1929, there were three hundred twenty-four stores, and by 1932 the company's retail sales surpassed those of the mail-order sales.

Sears, Roebuck & Company sold most of its mail-order centers in a wave of restructuring starting in the 1980s. Only the Los Angeles distribution center continued to function, while the centers in Philadelphia and Kansas City were demolished. In 1994 the company left the mail-order business discontinuing the publication of its catalog. While the warehouse space in the Los Angeles building became obsolete, the retail store continues to operate.

The Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building in Los Angeles merits listing in the National Register as the only large mail-order plant constructed by Sears, Roebuck & Company in the southwestern United States. It was the seventh mail-order center built by the company and was only the second constructed on the west coast, the other being located in Seattle. The facility provided mail-order service to markets in California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, western New Mexico, and Hawaii, as well as parts of Asia. It also contained the company's twelfth retail store and one of the few built in conjunction with a mail-order center.

The only comparable building in California to the subject building was the Montgomery Ward Building in Oakland. It was an eight-story, 950,000 square-foot store and mail-order warehouse of reinforced concrete frame and slab floors which was originally constructed in 1923. It was thereafter expanded by the addition of connected warehouse buildings and a multi-story parking garage. It became the first branch of Montgomery Ward Company in California, and distributed merchandise throughout the western states, much of it manufactured by local enterprises.

The history of Montgomery Ward Company is similar to that of Sears, Roebuck & Company. In 1872 Aaron Montgomery Ward, a traveling salesman created a single sheet catalogue with one hundred sixty-three items that customers could order through the mail. By 1883, the catalogue had expanded to ten thousand items covering two hundred forty pages. Like Sears, the company entered the retail business in the 1920s, opening its first store in Plymouth, Indiana in 1926. By 1928 the company had two hundred forty-four stores. In 1930, Sears proposed a merger of the two companies, but Montgomery Ward

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5 Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

Company declined the offer. The company's position began to shift in the 1960s as Sears, and J.C. Penney began to dominate the market. Later those companies would see their positions decline as the likes of K-mart, Target, and Wal-Mart expanded. The catalogue was discontinued in 1985 so that the company could focus on its retail stores.

The following year the company ceased operations in Oakland and vacated the building. Plagued with financial problems during the 1990s, the company filed for bankruptcy in 2000. The site in Oakland was eventually sold to the school district, and the building was demolished in 2001 after a lengthy legal battle to save it.

While the Los Angeles building does not appear to be eligible under Criterion C, its architectural history is worth noting. The Los Angeles building was one of the ten original mail-order distribution centers commissioned by Julius Rosenwald and designed by George C. Nimmons. A native of Wooster, Ohio, Nimmons began his career in the Chicago office of Burnham & Root, where he worked as a draftsman for ten years. At the age of twenty-eight, Nimmons served as Superintendent of Buildings for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition under the direction of Daniel Burnham, his employer who was appointed Director of Works.

In 1897, Nimmons formed a partnership with William K. Fellows. They designed several large commercial buildings in Chicago, including the first Sears, Roebuck & Company mail-order center in 1906. Following completion of the Sears' Chicago center, Nimmons and Fellows received commissions to design additional mail-order centers.

Nimmon's partnership with Fellows lasted until 1910. From 1910 until 1933, the architect remained in private practice as principal of the George Nimmons & Company and subsequently the firm of Nimmons & Company. He then partnered with George W. Carr and Clark C. Wright until his retirement in 1945. Nimmons is responsible for a large number of buildings found across the country. Examples of his work include the Reid Murdoch Building (Chicago 1913-14), Lake Shore Place (Chicago 1924-25), the Sears, Roebuck & Company mail order plants in Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Memphis, and Boston, and numerous other Sears, Roebuck & Company stores and facilities. The four-building complex in Chicago (1905-06) served as the company's headquarters until 1973. It also included the printing plant that for many years produced the Sears Catalog.

All of the mail order centers share a common design vocabulary, which isn't surprising as the same architect designed them for the same purpose. A central tower flanked by lower masses is found in all of the buildings. The older buildings, like the one in Chicago, were finished with red brick with stone trim. The later buildings, like the one in Los Angeles, adopted the Art Deco style and were either finished in

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6 Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

concrete or stucco. Two of the ten – those in Philadelphia and Kansas City – have been demolished. Only the ones in Chicago and Boston have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Similar to other structures designed by Nimmons, the function of the Los Angeles building determined its design. The lower two stories, which housed the 57,600 square foot retail store, provided a wide base out of which the mass of the structure was erected. The retail store required a much larger floor area than the mail order departments housed in the rest of the building. Similarly, the mail-order departments were best arranged over each other in a multi-storied configuration. This design provided light for offices in each level and interior space for the movement of merchandise throughout the building. The 226-foot tower was likewise designed to house a large water tank that supplied the building's gravity-fed sprinkler system.

One of the most significant aspects of the building is its reinforced concrete construction. A relatively new use for large commercial and industrial buildings in the 1920s, reinforced concrete construction reduced the overall cost of constructing large buildings and provided architects with more freedom to manipulate the form and ornamentation of their designs. Using reinforced concrete, the structural load-bearing capacity of a building could be carried in floor slabs rather than in more traditional beams and girders. This innovation saved on overhead room and reduced the floor-to-floor heights required in multi-stories buildings. The reinforced concrete construction also provided the means to ornament the building with elaborate Art Deco style details without employing other materials.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 8

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 8

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

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Boston, Massachusetts, listed 1/7/1991,

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10_ Page

**Sears, Roebuck & Co. Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, CA**

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

Assessor's Parcel Number 5183-012-004 corresponding to Tract #9410 por of Lot 1 and Tract #6783 por of Lots 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Block 8; also as that land bounded by 12th Street, Soto Street, Olympic Boulevard, and Rio Vista Ave. in Los Angeles and comprising 12.3 acres; as shown on the accompanying Sketch Map.

Boundary Justification

The legal lots the building historically and currently occupies.

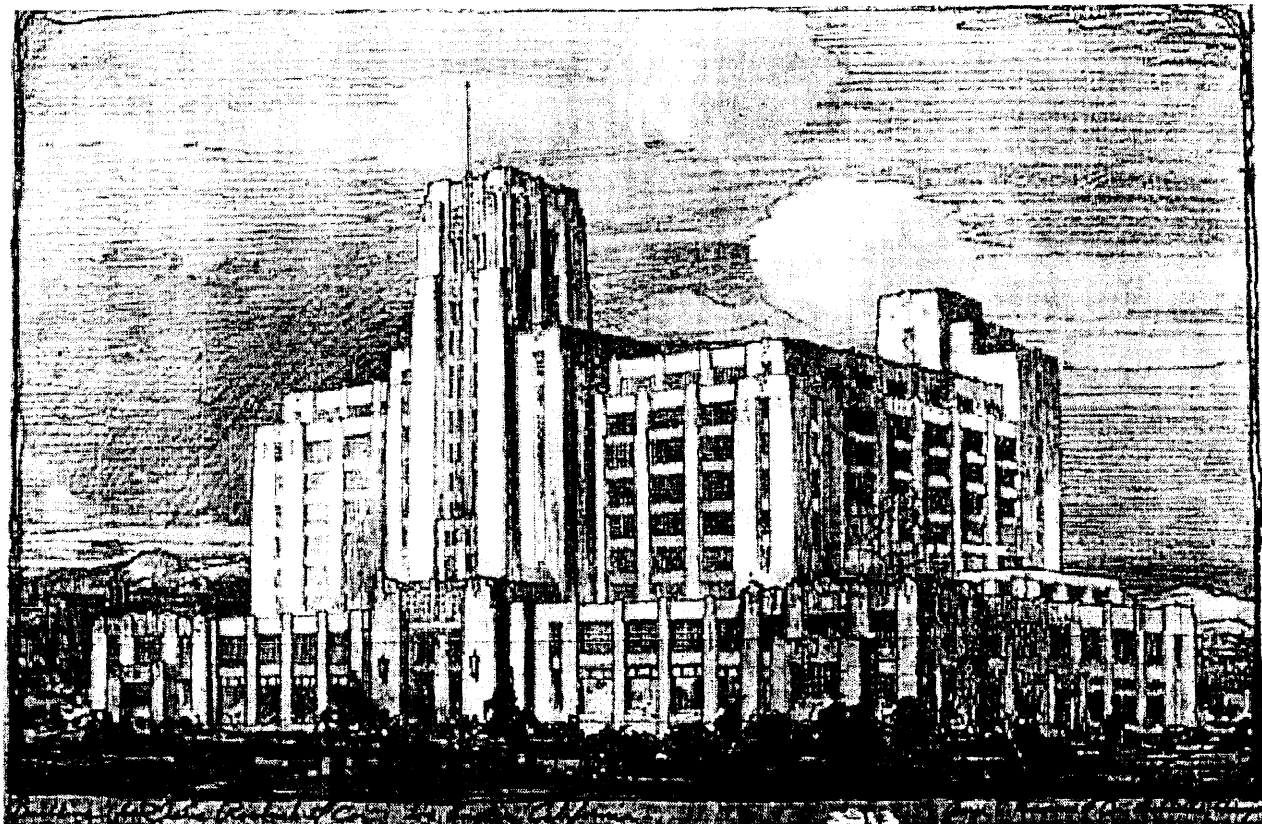
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 9

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

HISTORIC RENDERING
Los Angeles Central Library Photo Collection
No Date



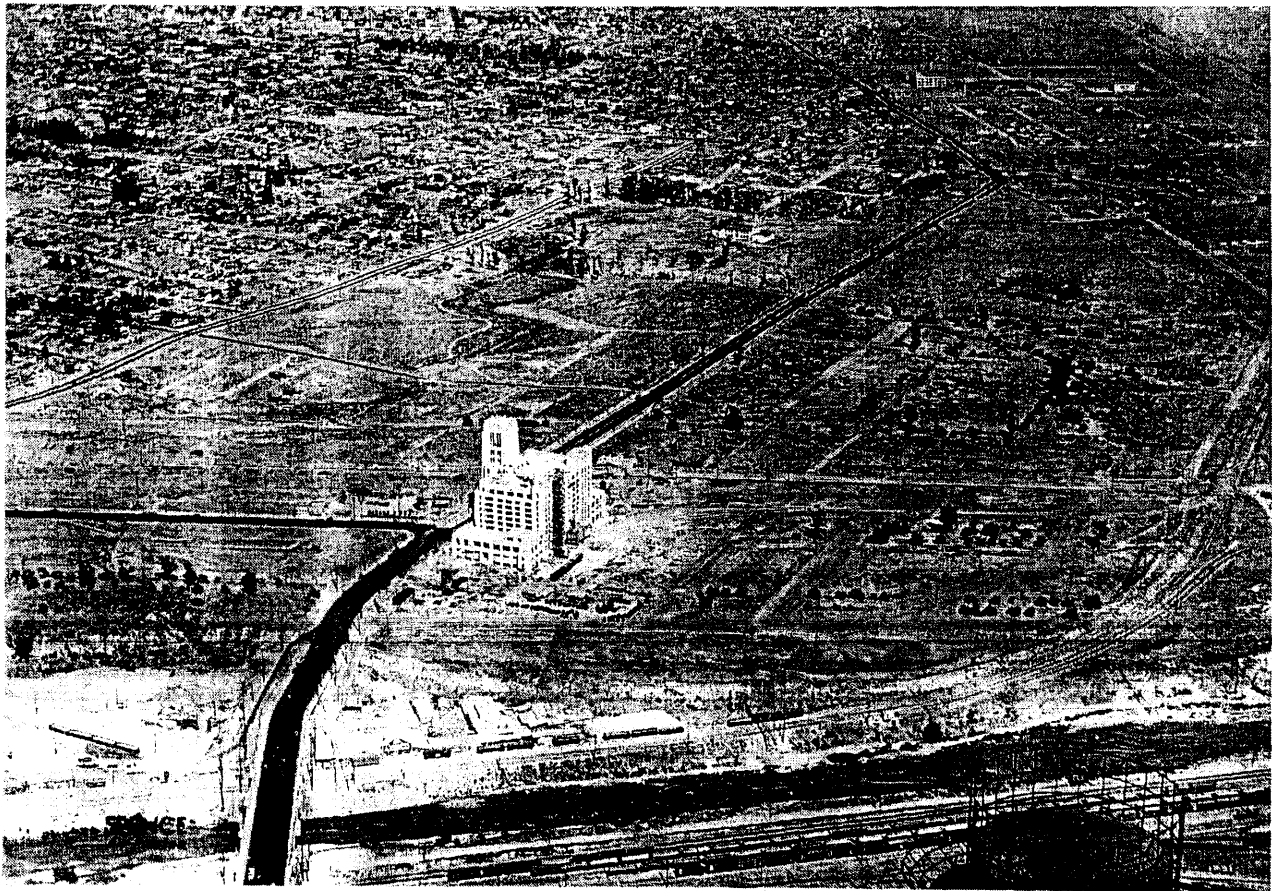
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 10

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

AERIAL
Sears, Roebuck & Company Archives
1927



LOS ANGELES MAIL ORDER -- 1927

Gross Area - 383,462 sq. ft.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 11

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

ENTRANCE

Sears, Roebuck & Company Archive

1927



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

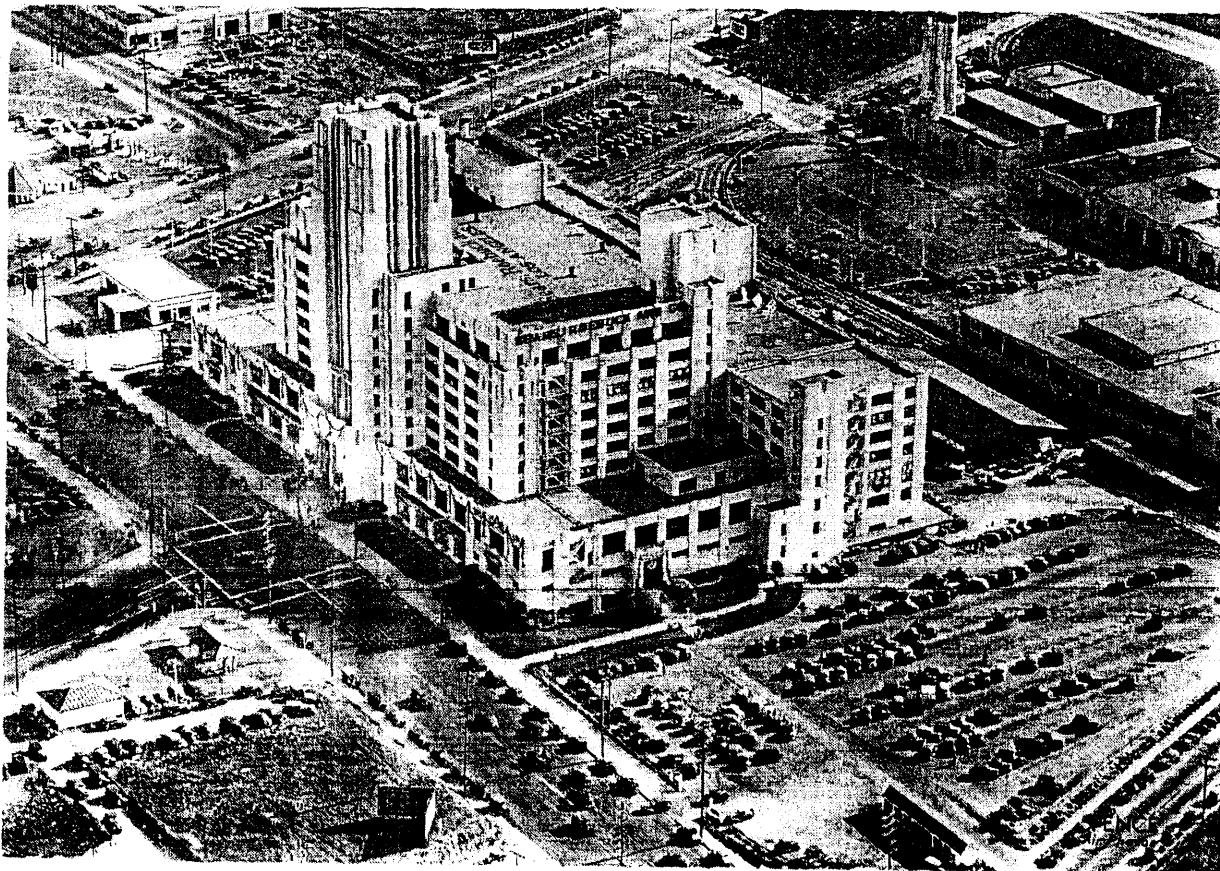
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 12

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

AERIAL

Sears, Roebuck & Company Archive
1936



1936

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

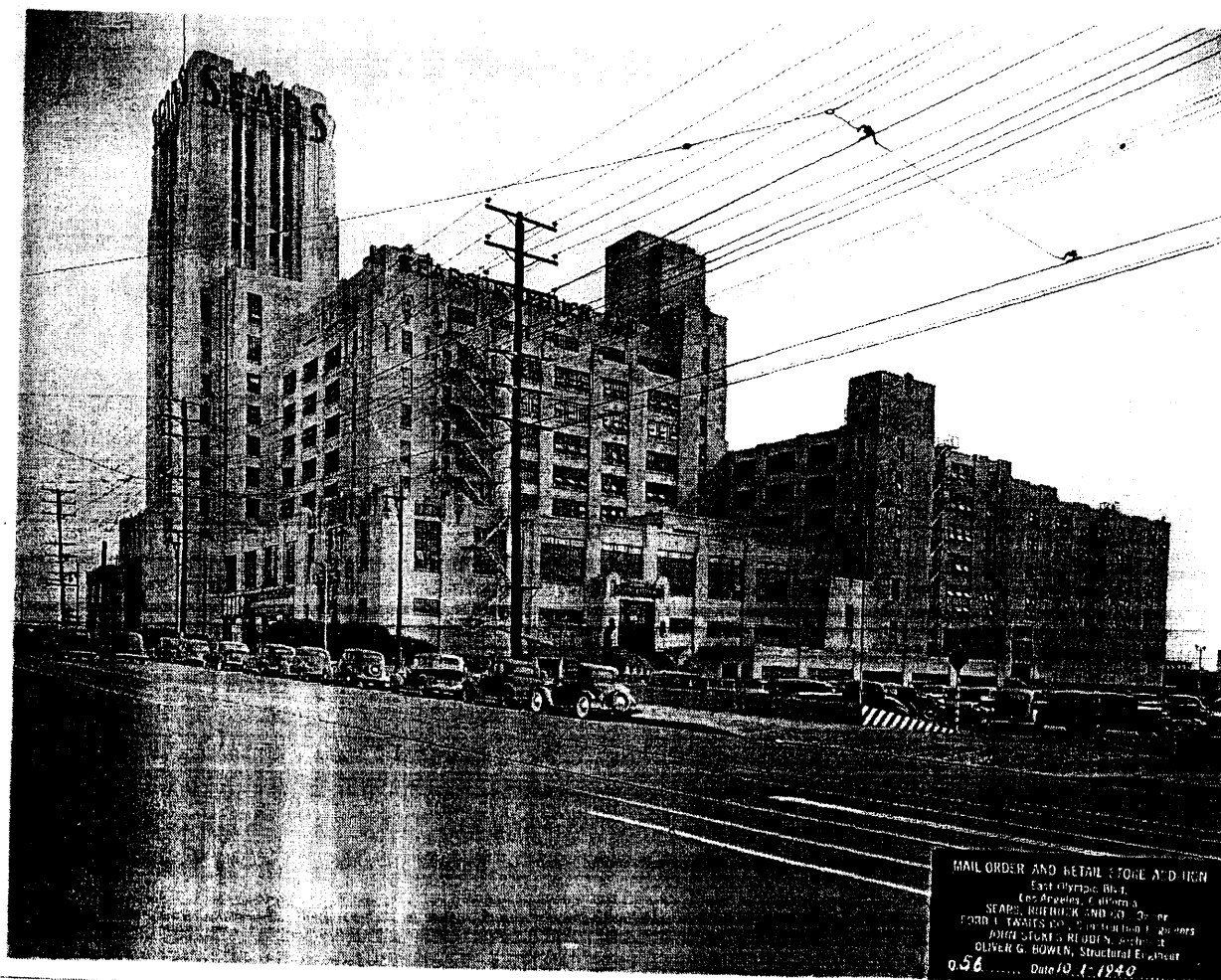
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 13

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

AERIAL

Sears, Roebuck & Company Archive
1940



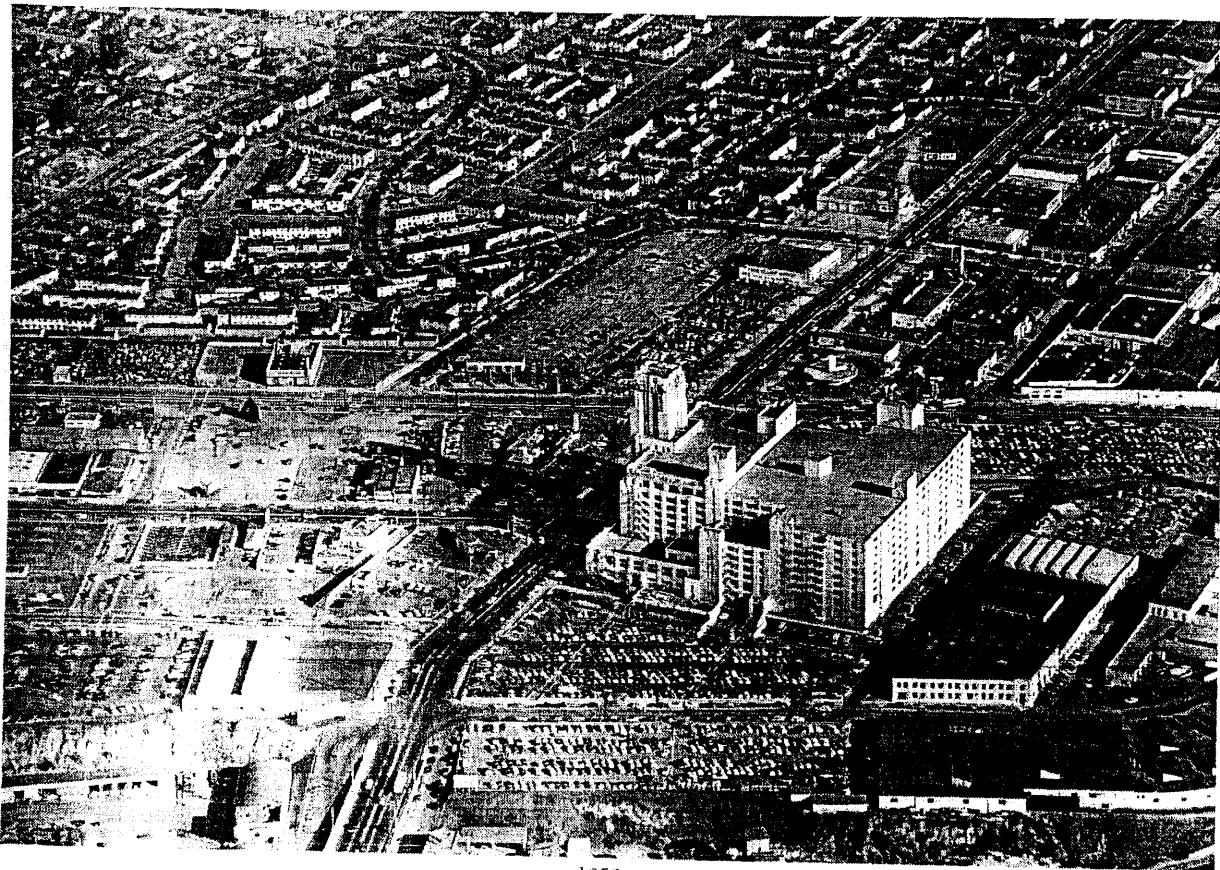
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 14

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

AERIAL
Sears, Roebuck & Company Archive
1953



1953

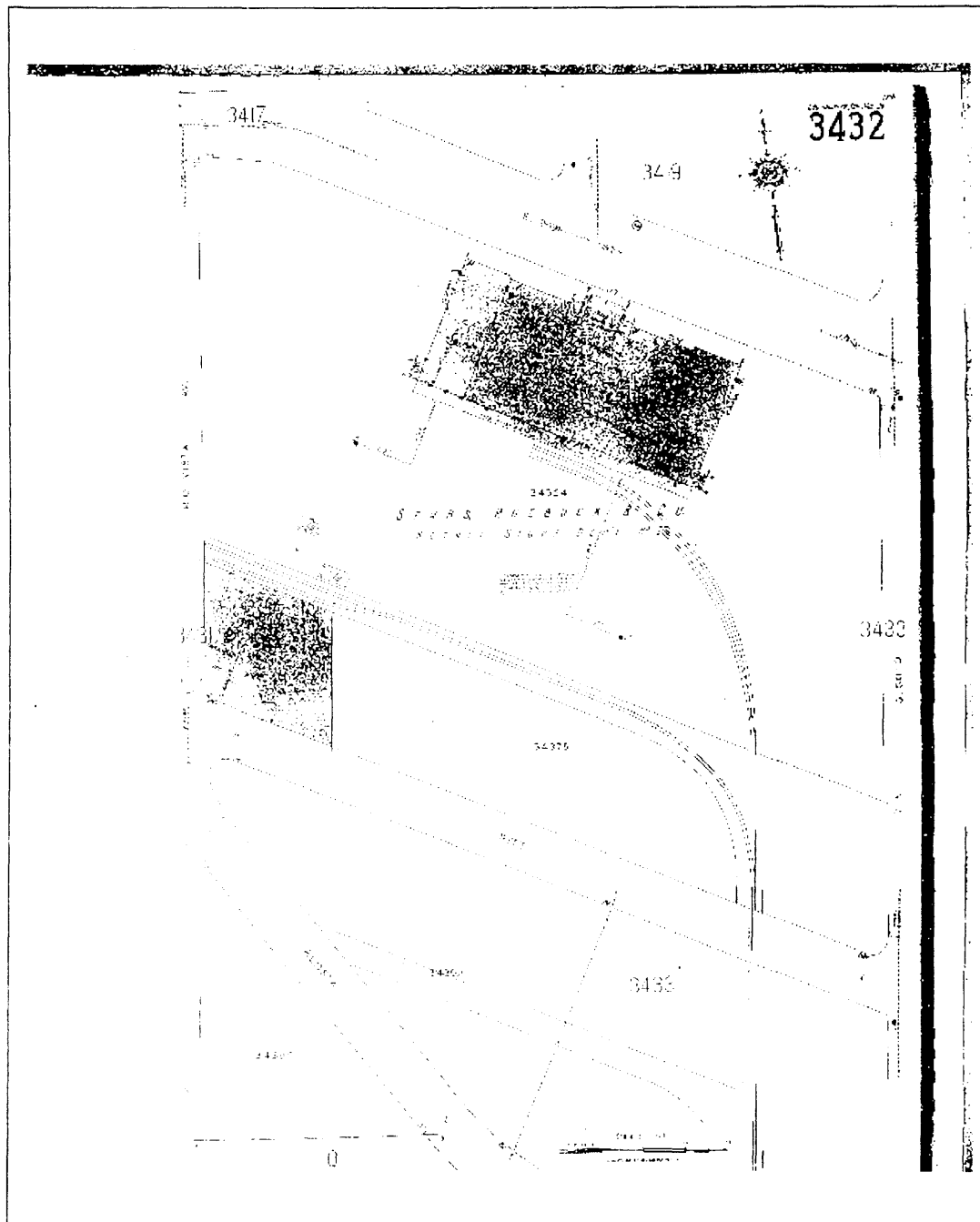
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 15

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

SANBORN MAP
1928



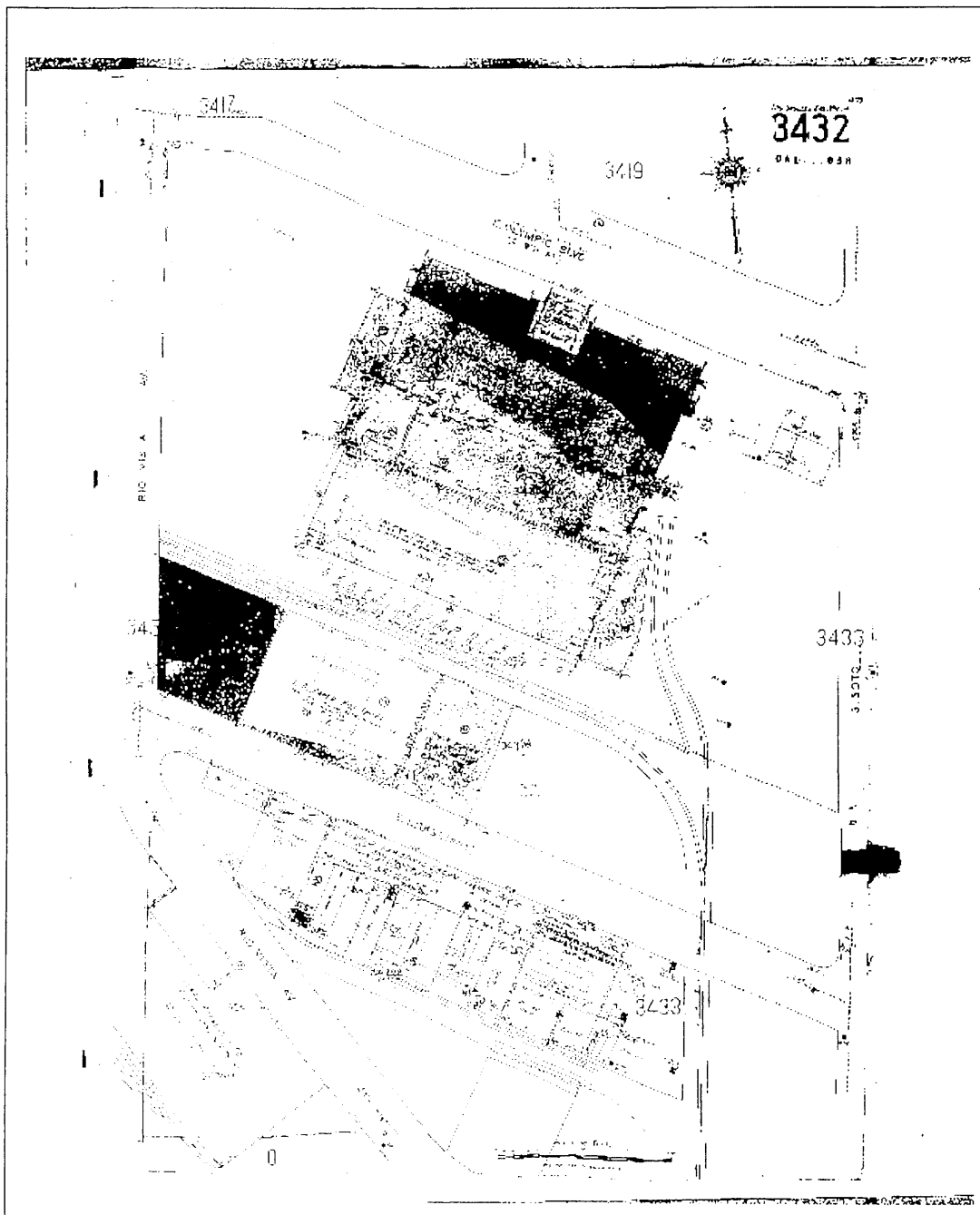
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 16

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

SANBORN MAP
1950



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 17

Sears, Roebuck & Company Mail Order Building
Los Angeles County, California

SKETCH MAP

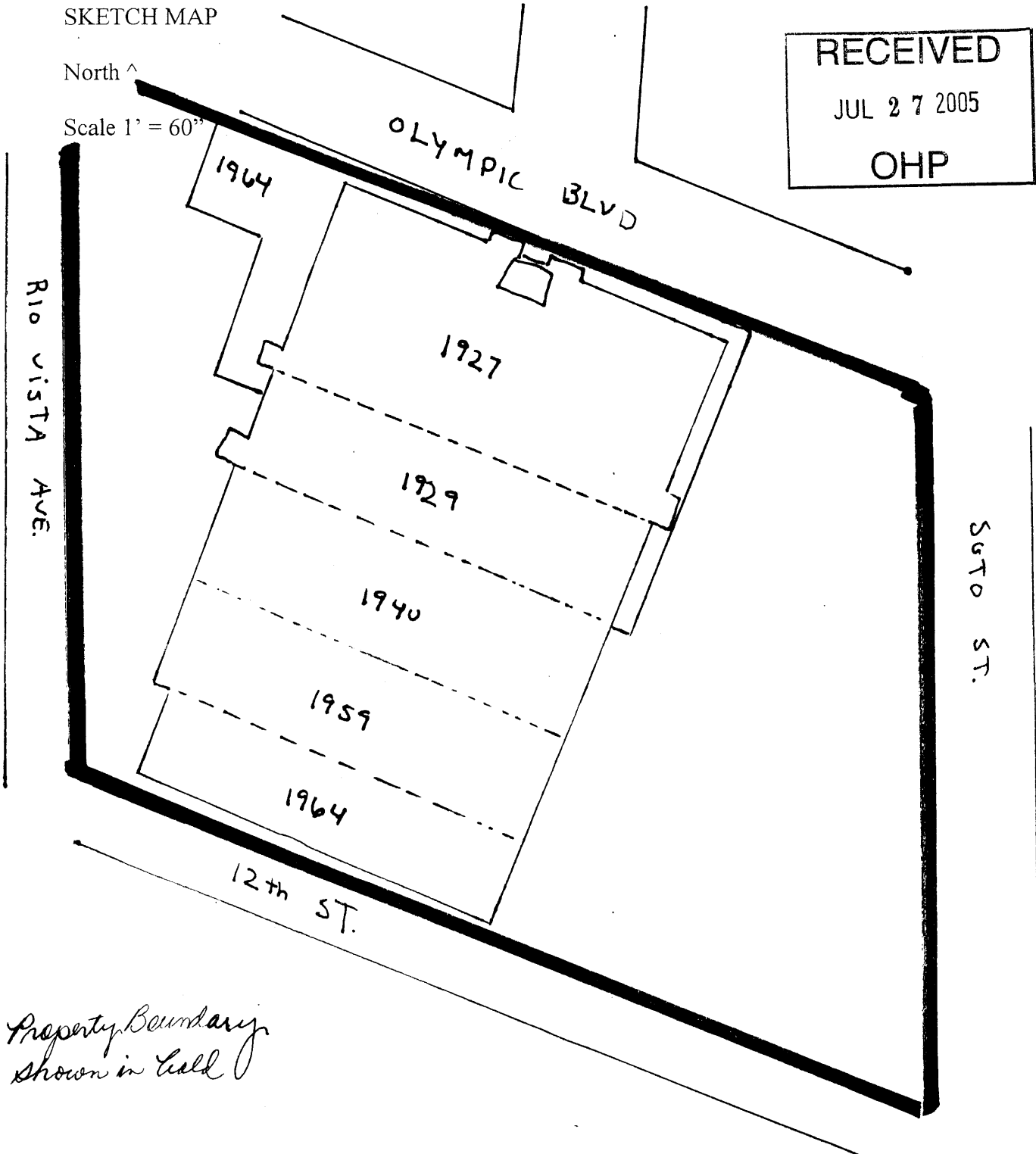
North ^

Scale 1" = 60'

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OHP



*Property Boundary
shown in bold*